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## **ROBERT T. LINCOLN AND JAMES R. DOOLITTLE.**

### **Interesting Political and Historical Letter from the James R. Doolittle Private Correspondence.**

Contributed by DUANE MOWRY, of Milwaukee, Wis.

Introductory Note by the Contributor: Perhaps, the correspondence which follows is almost self-explanatory. And yet the letter in chief by Ex-Senator Doolittle uncovers, as it seems to the contributor, a lofty and unselfish patriotism which is altogether too rare among partisans of any and all shades of political parties.

It is not so long ago when the distinguished son of the great President Lincoln was in the political limelight. Many of us still living distinctly remember that. And it was a noble and worthy thought of the late Judge Doolittle to call to the attention of Robert T. Lincoln the possibilities of the Republican National Convention of 1884. And he felt, as the personal and political friend and associate of the martyred president, that he had a right, as well as an honest interest, in so doing.

The letter to the son, Robert, may not have disclosed great political foresight. Subsequent political events shows that it did not. Nevertheless, there is much of real political and historical interest in the letter, a letter, which Robert is frank to say is "remarkable."

Some of the political judgments indicated by Judge Doolittle may seem a bit harsh. And yet future historical judgments have confirmed the correctness of most of them. Mr. Doolittle knew men and measures of the civil war period as few of us now living knew them. And he was perfectly fearless in pronouncing his estimate of them and their place in the history of the country.

He was incontestably right upon this question of reconstruction following the close of the civil war. And his intense hatred of the carpetbag regime in the South was both pardonable and eminently just. A truer friend of the

country, both North and South, did not hold public office during this trying period. And it did great honor to his unselfish devotion to principle, that he preferred to lose cast with his fellow citizens in his home state, Wisconsin, rather than do violence to the behests of his conscience. But the judgment of history has long since approved his stand on the great national questions of that time.

It seems that Mr. Robert T. Lincoln did not take the subject of Mr. Doolittle's letter very seriously. And subsequent events seem to have justified Mr. Lincoln in that view. But the fact remains that the letter is worthy of the man and the occasion. And aside from that political fact, there is historical interest in the letter, which should have the light of day. And in that view, Mr. Robert Lincoln joins me.

(Private and Confidential)

Chicago, Ill., June 3rd, 1884.

HON. ROBERT T. LINCOLN.

My dear Sir:

My relations to your father were such, that although we have only met upon the terms of ordinary friendship, I feel authorized to speak in terms of the strictest confidence. You may not be aware of the fact that in the National Committee of 1860 at New York, I drew the call for the convention which nominated him. At that time there was no Republican Party in Pennsylvania or in New Jersey. There was a People's Party in the former, and a Union Party in the latter. How to bring them all together was the question. I drew a call addressed to the Republicans of the several states, to the members of the People's Party in Pennsylvania, and of the Union Party of New Jersey. I presume in that committee, of fifty persons nearly, including some wise counsellors with the committee, I made twenty speeches, before I could get it through their heads that if we did not invite Pennsylvania and New Jersey, we might just as well have no convention at all.

"What!" said they, "are we not Republicans? Will you lower the flag?" My reply was, let us invite them to our feast and present with the invitation the Bill of Fare. All

who are in favor of five things, naming them, and all who are opposed to five other things, are invited to take part.

After an all night's struggle it was adopted. Right then and there was victory organized. Pardon me if I refer to something never published. I do so only to let you know better the relations between your father and myself.

Before the Convention came off in 1860, the Hon. Preston King, of New York, occupied rooms adjoining mine in Capitol Hill. He was a devoted Seward man. The Blairs favored Bates, of St. Louis. The discussions about the nominee were frequent and earnest between King and myself. Again and again, I pressed him for his second choice after it would be found that Seward could not be nominated. While in his stubborn and honest loyalty to his friend, Seward, his constant reply was, "I have no second choice." I finally gave to him my best judgment upon the result in advance. Said I, "Mr. King, you will not nominate Seward. He has been too much identified with abolitionists who think the Constitution, as it stands, authorizes Congress to interfere with slavery. The Higher Law doctrine will not be approved by the Republican Party. Nor will Mr. Bates be nominated. He comes from a state where his education has not been enough in harmony with the masses of the Republican Party."

"But," I said, "there is Mr. Lincoln, of Illinois. He stands half way between the two, and he will, probably, be the nominee. As Mr. Lincoln is from the West, the Vice President will be from the East. As Mr. Lincoln is of Whig antecedents, the Vice President must be of Democratic antecedents. It would fall on you, Mr. King, if you would take it. But I know you would not, for that would seem to make you false to your friend, Seward. Therefore, the only man who can fill the Bill will be Hamlin, of Maine. Lincoln and Hamlin is probably to be our ticket."

All this talk was some two weeks before Mr. King came on to the Convention, here.

I claim no gift of prophecy. It was simply a move of *reasoning or guessing*, upon the political forces in operation. Instinct, perhaps.

Again, in a very trying hour, when the disasters of the war and the heavy drafts of soldiers and the burden of

taxes were pressing sore upon us, and there was a wide spread opposition to your father's re-nomination in 1864, when the Wades and Chandlers and Thad. Stevens had called a Bolt-ing Convention and nominated Fremont at Cleveland; when Governor Yates and Joe Medill and Senator Trumbull were determined to throw him overboard, I was invited to speak at a mass meeting of 20,000 at Springfield, at your father's own home. Yates had a dinner party, and then it was resolved to set him aside, and Yates himself was chosen as the orator to lead the movement.

He first addressed the meeting. In a long speech he spoke of the affection and love for your father. "But and if," and "if and but," there might be "a painful necessity to choose some other standard bearer." I listened to that speech for an hour or more, with my soul stirred and roused nearer to the State of Inspiration than it ever was in before. When he finished they called on me. My voice, though it trembled with emotion, was still clear and reached every ear. "Fellow citizens: I believe in God. Under Him, and, next to Him, I believe in Abraham Lincoln." Those words broke the conspiracy in Illinois. Such cheers and shouts you never heard. Since the world began, there was never anything like it. When I got through Yates arose and said, "The people demand the re-election of Lincoln."

Now, you may ask why I should take the liberty of writing to you so long a personal letter. I will tell you frankly. It is this:

After your father was assassinated, the Republican Party, under Thad. Stevens and Stanton and others, was revolutionized. Stevens had more power than even Robespierre in the French Convention, with the men who followed him, and boldly avowed that we were "outside" the Constitution in dealing with States south of the Potomac. His great genius, iron will, intense hate, inflamed by the destruction of his iron works by the rebels, and inflamed by his interior life, and the sense of moral degradation which came from his living in open shame with the wife of a negro barber, whom he had stolen from Harrisburg, and which made him wish to drag down to his own disgusting amalgamating condition the people of the South, made him in that hour of

madness, when "judgment fled to brutish beasts and men lost their reason," a terrible despot and most tyrannical leader of the revolution inside the Republican Party. His great genius, his great passions, his intensity of hate, all flamed up, and blazed and burned like an electric light, and the lesser gas lights flickering around him, could hardly be seen, as moon and stars go out of sight in the blazing sun of midday.

As long as Stevens lived, he kept the party *outside* the Constitution. During that period, the crimes of that party against the Constitution are too terrible to be recounted. They made war on ten States; Aye! two years after peace and amnesty had been declared, they did what the Rebellion could not do, namely: They dissolved the Union by expelling ten States. They, "with a steel pen made of a bayonet," (to quote Garfield), erased the names of ten States in this Union, and wrote in their places "Five Military Provinces." They erased from the Constitution the sacred words, "Habeas Corpus," "the right of trial by jury;" and wrote in their places, Martial Law, Drum Head Courts Martial. They abolished all Civil Law from the Potomac to the Rio Grande, and subjected 10,000,000 of people to the absolute military despotism of five generals of the army.

You know how I struggled against this revolution in the government; this trampling under foot of the Constitution which all of them, time and time again, had sworn to support.

But pass over all this, which I cannot think of without stirring my soul to its depths. Come down to Grant's time, after there was a pretense by the Republican leaders, that they had got once more back *inside* the Constitution.

The Southern States then were still held to have no rights under the Constitution which the powers at Washington were bound to respect; and, during all his terms, both of them, the Constitution was so loosely construed as to give to Congress and to the executive every power *not expressly denied*; and, during all that time the march towards Centralized Despotism was steady, constant, and with rapid and gigantic strides.

Grant, though a great soldier, was never any more fit for the civil duties of President, whose oath requires him to *support and defend the Constitution*, than he has proved him-

self to be fit for the head of a Banking House in Wall Street. He had and has no idea of the limitations imposed by the Constitution on federal power. He had and has no idea of the rights of the States reserved under the Constitution.

I believe this revolution now going on in favor of Centralism is surely undermining our Constitutional Liberties. For eighteen years, I have been in one long, desperate battle to resist it, and overcome it, and in trying to turn back the administration of the government upon the old idea of the fathers, namely:

That the Union is Sovereign in National affairs, only;

That the States are Sovereign in State affairs;

That the Constitution is over all, defining the powers of the Union, and reserving the powers and rights of the States, and that in all doubtful questions we should lean not in favor of, but against Centralization.

I said, I have struggled hard to resist this revolution. I have sought to do it by electing a Democratic President in 1868, 1872, 1876 and 1880—four times. But that has failed. The revolution is going right on, with rapid strides.

In my heart of hearts, I have sometimes thought no help can come from man. That God alone is sufficient for this great work. How He may interfere to save our institutions is not for human nature to know. But I have sometimes thought it possible, in spite of your disinclination to take the place, that the Convention now here, in its sore distress, not knowing what they can do, will nominate you.

Should such a thing happen, then, my prayer to God is, that you may be chosen leader to bring back this Republican Party to *the true idea of the Constitution*, to the very ideas on which that party organized, and won its victory, in the election of your father in 1860.

Enclosed I send you a *statement of what in substance* I would hope to see in your letter of acceptance on three great questions, which, I hope, *if you are nominated*, will appear by the first of July, before the meeting of the Democratic Convention, of which I am to be a member from Wisconsin.

We do not know what may happen. But should this happen, I think I should see a silver lining on the sky, and that my hopes of the future would brighten. To save Re-

publican and Constitutional Liberty is all I desire for my countrymen. I ask nothing for myself. If its salvation can come by a Republican President, I will rejoice. If it comes by a Democratic President, I will rejoice. If it could come by a President chosen by a whole people, I would rejoice still more.

This letter is, of course, the confidential letter of a friend speaking from his heart to the honored son of his friend of many years.

Sincerely yours,

J. R. DOOLITTLE.

Note: The above is a carbon copy of what purports to be a letter written to the Hon. Robert T. Lincoln, the son of the Martyred President, Abraham Lincoln, by the Hon. James R. Doolittle, for twelve years a United States Senator from Wisconsin, from 1857 to 1869. As the "carbon copy," which was found by the contributor among the private papers and documents of the late Ex-Senator Doolittle, was unsigned, I deemed it proper to ascertain if, in fact, such a letter had been received by Mr. Lincoln before offering it for publication. Also, if he would have any objection to its publication. The correspondence bearing upon the matter follows.—Duane Mowry.

2442 Chestnut Street,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin,  
January 29, 1916.

HON. ROBERT T. LINCOLN,  
Chicago, Ill.

My dear Mr. Lincoln: In a recent examination of the letters and documents of the late ex-Senator James R. Doolittle, I have found a typewritten copy of what purports to be a letter to you from Judge Doolittle. It is dated at Chicago as of June 3, 1884, and is marked "private and confidential." It deals with political and historical matters, and largely concerns your father, and, incidentally, yourself. It is, however, of enough general interest to warrant its publication.

I am writing to you to know if you have any objection to its publication? I do not make it a practice to publish letters written to the living, or written by the living, unless I have their permission to do so. I presume you know of this letter, and I need not identify it further or more particularly.

Awaiting your reply, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

DUANE MOWRY.



Mr. Lincoln's very prompt reply follows:

New York, February 4, 1916.

DUANE MOWRY, Esquire,  
2442 Chestnut Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

My dear Mr. Mowry: Your favor respecting the letter of Senator Doolittle reaches me here via Chicago and Washington.

After thirty years I cannot recall any special letter from Senator Doolittle. Many such things have been destroyed. But if this one exists, it is now inaccessible, being in my old files in my closed-up house in Manchester, Vermont, where I cannot be until spring, either to look for the letter or for any preserved reply to it.

It is my guess that I would have no objection to its publication. I am to be at the Pullman Building, Chicago, next Monday and probably at least until Tuesday noon. If, therefore, you will send me for inspection your typewritten copy, I will examine it and return it to you with my reply, which, as I have said, will probably be an assent to your wish.

Very truly yours,

ROBERT T. LINCOLN.

Following is the contributor's note inclosing the copy of Judge Doolittle's letter above mentioned:

Milwaukee, Wis., Feb. 6, 1916.

HON. ROBERT T. LINCOLN,  
Pullman Building,  
Chicago, Ill.

My dear Mr. Lincoln:

In accordance with the letter just received by special delivery from New York, I am enclosing the copy of Judge Doolittle's letter for your inspection and direction. It is possible, in addition to the permission to publish this letter, I may wish to make use of it in connection with a biography

of Senator Doolittle, which the heirs of Mr. Doolittle desire to have me prepare.

Thanking you in advance for your kindness in this matter,  
I beg to remain, Very truly yours,

DUANE MOWRY.

Mr. Lincoln's answer, returning the typewritten copy of Senator Doolittle's letter, is as follows:

The Pullman Company,  
Office of the Chairman.

February 8, 1916.

My dear Mr. Mowry:

I found your letter of the 6th instant here on my arrival yesterday, but I have not been able to give it attention until now.

I return to you the typewritten copy or draft of the letter from Senator Doolittle, addressed to me and dated June 3d, 1884, which I have read with great interest and attention. It is so remarkable a letter that I am quite certain I should remember it if I had seen it before, but I do not recall it at all and I, therefore, have a very strong belief that it is a draft of a letter which he never sent to me. I have two possible ways of ascertaining my correctness as to this—my own file of letters received in which I have retained anything that I regarded as worth keeping when I went over my files some years ago, and I think this letter from Senator Doolittle would have been put in my permanent file at that time; next I have my letter press books in perfect order, and it is certain that I would have acknowledged to Senator Doolittle any such letter as this, and that a copy of my acknowledgment would be in its proper place. Unfortunately, all of these papers are in a special room of mine at my country place in Manchester, Vermont, which is for the winter entirely closed up, no person living in the house, its oversight being entrusted to employes living in nearby cottages, and the situation is such that I cannot have a search in this matter made by any one there. So do not expect to return to Vermont until late

next April, and therefore a search in this matter cannot be made before that time.

Feeling strongly, as I do, that Senator Doolittle never sent this letter to me, I feel, of course, that I have no right whatever to express an opinion as to its publication as a part of the work upon which you are engaged.

It occurs to me that the question of the letter having been sent might be solved by yourself if you find among the Senator's papers any acknowledgment from me. If you do find such a letter and will send it to me I will take pleasure in writing you further in this matter. Believe me,

Very truly yours,

ROBERT T. LINCOLN.

Duane Mowry, Esq.,  
2442 Chestnut Street,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The contributor, not being quite satisfied with Mr. Lincoln's very courteous and full reply, sent him the following:

Milwaukee, Wis., February 15, 1916.

My dear Mr. Lincoln:

I have your favor of the 8th inst., with the Doolittle letter inclosed, or, as I believe it to be, the carbon copy of a letter directed to you by Judge Doolittle.

Since receiving your letter I have made a further search among the letters and documents of the late Senator Doolittle for the purpose of finding some evidence of the acknowledgment of the letter from you, but without success. I do not claim to have *all* of Judge Doolittle's private papers and correspondence. But I have many hundreds of these documents. Several hundred have already been presented to historical societies by myself. I am sure, however, that one from you was not included in the list.

I agree with you that the letter is important enough to have elicited a reply of some kind. I hope, when you return to your summer home in Vermont, you will feel inclined to

make an investigation of your letters and of your letter press books, with a view of establishing the existence of both.

I might add, in passing, that the Doolittle letter sounds like the great commoner. He was a strong party man, but above and beyond party fealty was his lofty and high-minded patriotism. It was his thought that you might have been the man of the hour for his country's good. This letter clearly foreshadows that idea. Although a Democrat in 1884, he would have preferred the success of a Republican presidential candidate, if such success would have spelled greater advantage to his country.

But I should not inflict this long letter on your attention. Trusting to hear from you presently, I beg to remain,

Very truly yours,

DUANE MOWRY.

Hon. Robert T. Lincoln,  
The Pullman Company,  
Chicago.

The final letter from Mr. Lincoln incloses a letter press copy of Mr. Lincoln's acknowledgment of the receipt of Senator Doolittle's letter, which is as follows:

Washington, D. C., June 9, 1884.

My dear Sir:

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of June 3d, which I have read with great interest.

I have not at any time supposed that the contingency would occur upon which your friendly suggestions were based, and I am not at all disappointed. Please accept the assurances of my appreciation of the kind sentiments you express.

I am,

Very truly yours,

ROBERT T. LINCOLN.

HON. J. R. DOOLITTLE,  
Chicago, Ill.

A part of Mr. Lincoln's final letter to the contributor, under date of May 20, 1916, is as follows:

I have delayed acknowledging your kindness so that I might upon getting here (in his Vermont home) look up my files in regard to the letter of Senator Doolittle. I have now done so and am not able to find that letter. It was probably destroyed with an immense number of old letters and papers when I broke up my residence in Chicago about five years ago, but I find in one of my letter books a letter to Senator Doolittle which acknowledges the receipt of a letter which is with little doubt the one of which you sent me a copy. I enclose you a copy of my reply from my letter book. Senator Doolittle's letter to me was dated June 3rd, and my acknowledgment of it June 9th. I find upon examination that the Republican National Convention in 1884 was held in Chicago on June 6th, Mr. Blaine being nominated on the fourth ballot, and the reference in my note to my lack of disappointment is explained by the fact that the number of votes necessary to a choice was something over four hundred, and that the highest vote for me was eight, and that six of my ardent supporters probably went over to Mr. Blaine on the last ballot.

Believe me,

Very truly yours,

ROBERT T. LINCOLN.

Duane Mowry, Esq.